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Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training  
Quarterly Report  
Third Quarter – April 7, 2015 to July 6, 2015

Original Submission Date: July 31, 2015  
Resubmission Date: August 26, 2015

Contract Number: AID-486-C-14-00001  
Activity Start Date and End Date: October 6, 2014 to October 5, 2019  
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This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development Regional Development Mission for Asia (USAID/RDMA).

## ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COP	Chief of Party
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
COMET	Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
EDC	Education Development Center, Inc.
EAls	Education Advisory Institutions
GDA	Global Development Alliance
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HP	Hewlett Packard
IPSR	Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University
ITE	Institute of Technical Education (ITE)
LM	Lower Mekong
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MOLs	Mekong Learning Centers
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MS2W	MekongSkills2Work
MTOT	Master Training of Trainers
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
PMEP	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
RFA	Request for Applications
RFP	Request for Proposals
SEAMEO	South East Asian Ministers of Education Secretariat Office
STEM+AT	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Accounting, and Tourism
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
TOT	Training of Trainers
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VIA	Volunteers in Asia
WRN!	Work Ready Now!

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW/SUMMARY

<b>Program Name:</b>	Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
<b>Activity Start Date And End Date:</b>	October 6, 2014 to October 5, 2019
<b>Name of Prime Implementing Partner:</b>	Education Development Center, Inc.
<b>Contract Number:</b>	AID-486-C-14-00001
<b>Name of Subcontractors:</b>	Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University
<b>Major Counterpart Organizations</b>	Ministries of Education and Labor in Lower Mekong countries, universities, vocational training institutes, private sector partners.
<b>Geographic Coverage (cities and or countries)</b>	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam
<b>Reporting Period:</b>	April 7, 2015 to July 6, 2015

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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of the USAID Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (USAID COMET) project under the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) is to assist universities and vocational centers to increase the number of skilled workers in high-growth industries in the countries of the Lower Mekong (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam). Over the next four years, the project plans to help 100 post-secondary education institutions equip 250,000 youth with the workplace skills demanded by local businesses.

In Q3 (April 7 – July 6) 2015, USAID COMET focused on four key activities, all intended to advance this year's goal of “*Testing the Model*” related to building instructional capacity for teaching high quality workplace skills. These four key activities include:

*In support of Component One:*

1. Completion of the regional baseline STEM+AT Labor Market Assessment (Baseline Assessment);
2. Development of a strategy and implementation guidelines for the USAID COMET social media and portal presence, through the brand MekongSkills2Work.

*In support of Components Two and Three:*

3. Establishment of a robust set of tools that address the variety of local contexts in which the USAID COMET curriculum will be implemented. This includes instructor guidelines for implementing blended and participatory learning methodologies, work-based learning activities, and other technical content (see sections 3 for more information).
4. Establishment of a pilot grant structure with Lower Mekong education and training institutions referred to as Education Advisory Institutions (EAls), to test the USAID COMET model and ensure that its programmatic objectives are evidence-based. By piloting with EAls and then using lessons learned to inform the design of the upcoming grants program, USAID COMET seeks to develop a common, evidence-based approach to closing the Lower Mekong (LM) skills gap across a variety of institutions, industries, and in-demand skills.

In Q4, USAID COMET seeks to build upon these key activities and develop a clear set of project guidelines for combining private sector input, labor market trends, and instructor training into a systemic model that can catalyze real and lasting change across the Lower Mekong. The upcoming quarter, therefore, will see the development of the USAID COMET *Sourcebook*, a compilation or set of toolkits in relevant topic areas, each of which can be customized to the local economy and academic context of implementing institutions. The concept behind the toolkits is to develop a common pedagogical model that applies across all the project's context but which allows for significant local adaptation and contextualization to account for variations in understanding and access to technology, geographical differences in industry, and the skills demanded by employers on a local level.

USAID COMET also anticipates launching an upgraded website in Q4, which will include sourcebook links for instructors. The project also anticipates issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for web portal development.

During the first quarter of USAID COMET's second year, the project will finalize the design of the grants program based upon lessons learned from EAls and issue a Request for Applications (RFA) to solicit prospective grantees. In Year 2, the project is anticipating the launch of the grants program, portal, and roll-out of evidence-based activities and curricula for instructors. This second year will see implementation and training of the core group of instructors and others who will lead the USAID COMET model in upcoming project years.

## 2. OVERVIEW

The goal of the USAID Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (USAID COMET) Project under the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) is to help universities and vocational centers to increase the number of skilled workers in high-growth industries in the Lower Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam).

USAID COMET brings together public and private sector partners and use information technology to deliver accessible training in key sectors. The contract is managed by the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) and implemented by the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC).

The ultimate objective of USAID COMET is to improve economic integration and global competitiveness through human resource development in the Lower Mekong sub-region. Through bringing offline technology and online resources to vocational and higher education institutions and learners, the project will seek to improve the workplace skills of young people in the Lower Mekong sub-region in STEM+AT. USAID COMET will connect large-scale multinational and national firms with vocational centers and higher education institution and other local stakeholders, to bring in the demand-driven skills and competencies.

### Regional Integration

USAID COMET is designed to accelerate the integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community through addressing goals outlined by the Initiative for ASEAN Integration. In addition, USAID COMET directly supports the strategy under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity to enhance the free flow of intra-ASEAN skilled labor, which in turn will promote deeper intra-ASEAN social and cultural interaction and increase regional linkages among the skilled workers in the Lower Mekong sub-region.

In this quarter, USAID presented COMET to the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting for Education (SOM-ED) in Hanoi, Vietnam, in late April. The SOM-ED was highly supportive of the USAID COMET goals and objectives and subsequently endorsed the project. This endorsement enables the project to use the ASEAN logo on all the project's official documents and online presence. This event marks the first time that an ASEAN sectoral body has endorsed a LMI project.

USAID COMET has been exploring options for future collaboration with key technology companies including Cisco, Intel, Microsoft, and National Instruments. A “marketplace” approach to engage technology-based private sector partners with educational institutions has been adopted as a means to empower educational institutions to become informed decision-makers on how to select and work with the private sector to find appropriate and relevant technology solutions for classroom teaching and learning. These discussions will also continue in the next quarter.

### Leveraging Innovative and Evidence-based Education Solutions

The Lower Mekong nations are all facing similar challenges in developing their current and upcoming skilled workforce in STEM+AT: a mismatch between the supply side skills training provided by educational institutions, and the workplace skills businesses need employees to exhibit in order to meet market expectations for efficiency, performance, and growth.

USAID COMET will take advantage of the “revolution” in higher education offered by online training, mobile technology, offline technology, and educational courses to engage youth in the Lower Mekong in sub-regional trainings that target local skills mismatches, as determined by the project’s local business partners.

In this quarter, USAID COMET conducted two initiatives intended to generate contextual evidence for innovative education solutions. These two initiatives are: 1) the Instructor Training Pilot, which introduced *workplace simulations*; and 2) The Training of Trainers, which introduced the USAID COMET *Sourcebook* and *Toolkit* approach. These initiatives were:

1. **Orientation to the EAI Partnership (June 22-23 in Vientiane, Laos)**, which provided orientation on the USAID COMET EAI partnership initiative including the training approach and participation requirements and activities.
2. **Training of Trainers (August 3-7 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia)**, which trained instructors on how to use the *toolkit* approach and how to adapt it to their current classroom activities and curricula.

Lessons learned from these two activities have had major impact on the design of the upcoming EAI pilot activity. This activity, to be launched in Q4 and extend through Q1 2016, will see five educational institutions introducing toolkits in classrooms. Results from this activity will be used to develop an evidence-based model for integrating the USAID COMET model as part of the anticipated grants program. This model will include evidence-based solutions for how to incorporate blended and participatory learning techniques into classrooms; and to connect businesses to educational institutions through effective teaching (workplace simulations) and learning (work exposure, internships, and/or apprenticeships).

**Indicator #1 Number of workforce development initiatives completed as a result of USG participation in public-private partnership (standard indicator #4.6.3-8)**

Q3 target: 3

Q3 achieved: 2

LOA target: 854

YI target: 6

Cumulative achieved (annual): 4

% Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: 67%  
achieved

### 3. COMPONENT ONE, CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND SKILLED WORKFORCE

Component One is intended to support the other two components under the project by strengthening online information sharing, research and management, and job forecasting in order to collectively support institutional capacity development and the strengthening of networks of education providers in the LM sub-region.

#### Baseline Regional Labor Market Assessment

The results of the 2015 Baseline Assessment identified five regional key industries clusters with links to high growth industry skills that will be the main focus of skill development for the project. The five industries clusters are agriculture/aquaculture, agro- processing, food and beverage processing; manufacturing component parts for large machinery and machine assembly; construction; electronics (low and high value add); and tourism.

The study revealed patterns in female workforce participation across industries, providing the project with the initial data needed to boost female employment in key sectors. Findings from the companies surveyed indicate that there were fewer female employees than male full-time and part-time employees. Industries with low female participation included manufacturing, chemical, construction, agriculture, and tourism; agriculture and construction were found to have the lowest levels of female participation. Industries with near equal participation included electronics and food processing. Industries with the highest female participation included garment and health care. Upcoming activities, including Q4's Institutional Assessment, are intended to provide a more comprehensive data-based snapshot that will allow the project to design targeted and effective solutions to address the gender gap.

Across the LM sub-region, surveyed employers expressed considerable interest in developing closer ties to training institutions through on-the-job training or internship programs. Among companies not implementing an internship program, the most commonly cited reason was a concern that interns would take too much staff time to properly train, and therefore that interns would act as a hindrance rather than to boost productivity. Employers frequently identified computer and English as non-technical skills that their employees need to improve. Basic computer skills and English are considered important and mandatory for skilled labor (at both technician and manager levels) in order for employees to perform their daily tasks properly. However, many students are not well trained on these skills before entering the job market, and employers reported extensive on-the-job training or probationary periods required before new hires were competent in needed workplace skills.

In terms of non-cognitive skills, diligence, teamwork, adaptability, communication, and time management were the most commonly cited as critical and lacking skills in new workforce entrants. In Cambodia, employers frequently reported a lack of foundational skills, such as literacy or numeracy, in new hires. This lack of foundational skills creates a barrier to further skills upgrading or training, as these employees typically find it difficult to learn how to learn.

The Baseline Assessment received significant press coverage including a USAID press release on April 1, 2015, an article on the Center for Strategic and International Studies website, Prosper,

on June 10, 2015, and a story covering the key results in one of Bangkok's leading newspapers, The Nation on June 1, 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Findings from the Baseline Regional Labor Market Assessment were:

- Distributed via the MekongSkills2Work.org website. Both the full report (<http://bit.ly/IFcTnLV>) and the executive summary (<http://bit.ly/IJoHfzK>) were available as downloadable PDFs;
- Shared in social media channels, including MekongS2Work Twitter, LMI Facebook Page, and USAID Asia Facebook;
- The project incorporated the findings from the study about the gaps in the current workforces in the development of instructional solutions. As part of the USAID COMET curriculum toolkit, instructors are guided to review labor market information from the Baseline Regional Labor Market Assessment, and subsequent updates to the assessment, to identify specific skills needed by workers and how to address these gaps through the development of supplemental curricula in their institutions.

## Website and Web Portal Development

USAID COMET continues to define and refine the MekongSkills2Work portal development plan in terms of both content and technical areas. The project plans to conduct a local vendor selection process in August and finalize the selection results in September to start the portal development locally.

USAID COMET continued developing the MekongSkills2Work portal in the third quarter (following the launch of MekongSkills2Work.org website on April 6, 2015). Specifically, USAID COMET:

- Outlined the basic architecture of the web portal, with relevance to both the technical developers and the user experience of the three core USAID COMET audiences: jobseekers, instructors, and industry partners;
- Designed interaction pathways between the these three core audiences;
- Discussed the content development plan of the portal including identifying which components will be sourced by the project, which will be uploaded by instructors, and which will be curated from external websites;
- Explored ways to drive traffic onto the site and portal using social media, word of mouth, and search engine optimization;
- Strategized ways to incentivize registration and interactions in the web portal and social media;
- Outlined steps needed to transition from US-based web developers to a local vendor in Thailand, including the initial draft scope of work. The project expects to issue a scope

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/asia-regional/press-releases/apr-1-2015-usaid-leads-new-initiative-expand-job-prospects-and>  
<http://csisprosper.com/2015/06/10/usaid-workforce-development-education-southeast-asia/>  
<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/USAID-to-play-key-role-in-strengthening-work-based-30261349.html>

of work for portal development as an RFP by September 2015 with vendor presentations to take place during October 2015.

Further, the MekongSkills2Work website is currently undergoing a full redesign in order to better meet next generation design standards and to support the dissemination of instructor toolkits. The project submitted wireframes for approval to USAID on July 20, 2015; a design round is underway, and will coincide with the delivery of the draft toolkits to instructors during the August 2015 Training of Trainers (TOT) held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. During this TOT, instructors will review the final toolkits; these revised toolkits will then be posted to the MekongSkills2Work site in September 2015.

### Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan Update

In late Q3, the USAID COMET program team reviewed the M&E Plan targets. The revision of indicator targets is based on actual implementation plans of the program. Justification was provided for each adjustment of targets. The M&E Plan was submitted and subsequently approved by USAID in this quarter. It should be noted that the M&E plan is a tool to help guide programming decisions that should be revisited at least every 12 months as program priorities evolve throughout the life of project.

#### **Indicator #1.2 Number of users reaching USAID COMET online portal and social media sites each month**

Q3 target: 2,500 per month

Q3 achieved: 4,234 per month

LOA target: 100,000 per month

Y1 target: 2,500 per month

Cumulative achieved (annual): 4,234 per month

There are no targets set for **indicator #1.1** in Y1.



#### 4. COMPONENT TWO, TRAINING TODAY'S WORKFORCE

The goal of Component Two is to provide vocational training to the current workforce in priority areas. USAID COMET aims to help technical vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in each country to prepare and implement supplemental curricula based on the skill gaps and key sectors identified by the Baseline Analysis. The partner institutions will work closely with local businesses to enhance the supplemental curricula with local employers skill requirements, provide learning experiences for students with the local employers, and provide a closer link with the work environment as a part of the training process.

##### Piloting the USAID COMET Model

In this quarter, USAID COMET continued testing the USAID COMET model with one educational institution from each of the participating countries. These Education Advisory Institutions or EAls are prototypes of the project's institutional leadership model. Four universities, in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, and one TVET institution in Laos were identified to serve as EAls to test the USAID COMET training approach and leadership model, and to inform the design of USAID COMET project components for future TOTs, the grants program, the training approach, etc. The EAI partnerships will be operational from June – December 2015 and include the following key activities:

1. **Orientation to the EAI Partnership (June 22-23 in Vientiane, Laos)** to provide orientation on the USAID COMET EAI partnership initiative including the training approach and participation requirements and activities.
2. **Training of Trainers (August 3-7 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia)** to train instructors on how to use the toolkit to “test the model”.
3. **Piloting the USAID COMET training approach** (Mid-August to December 2015) at individual university/TVET school. The trained instructors will adapt and implement the USAID COMET training model and approach in their classrooms.

During this quarter, the project held in-depth discussions with the Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH), to determine LANITH's potential as an EAI in Laos. LANITH is a small, but highly professional vocational institution. The discussions proved fruitful. LANITH agreed to work with the project as an EAI.

LANITH was invited to join the two-day Orientation to EAI Partnership workshop from June 22-23 in Vientiane, Laos. The Deputy Director and Head of the Education and Training Department represented. The orientation included an introduction to the USAID COMET training approach, participation requirements and a review of the planned activities to be undertaken by EAls. The project solicited inputs and feedback regarding the drafts of the training development toolkits. After the Orientation workshop, the USAID COMET team followed up with LANITH to continue discussions regarding the subcontracting process for the implementation of the toolkit and testing of the newly developed curricula as part of the process to formalize EAI partnership.

The next step was to invite LANITH to participate in the MekongSkills2Work TOT Workshop planned for Q4 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from August 3-7. A final stage of piloting the USAID COMET training model will require EAls to develop curricula and implement the curricula with students in each EAI.

### Institutional Assessment

USAID COMET began planning the Institutional Assessment, which will provide institutional profiles for universities and TVET institutions in all of the USAID COMET partner countries. The Institutional Assessment is designed to provide data covering some of the M&E indicators and will also provide institutional profiles that will be used to develop the criteria for the grants bidding process. The project began by compiling a list of accredited tertiary educational institutions in the LM countries. Based on the institutional websites, the project recorded contact information, courses offered, number of instructors, average number of students enrolled in STEM+AT fields, etc. Once the list of institutions is complete, USAID COMET will contact the institutions and ask them to complete a data collection form, which would allow USAID COMET to have more detailed information. The Institutional Assessment will be completed in September 2015.

### Grant Program for TVET Mekong Learning Centers

Based on a competitive grants bidding process, USAID COMET will select two TVET institutions in each Lower Mekong Country by January 2016. The selected institutions will serve as Mekong Learning Centers, the leadership institutions for the project.

In terms of the process and timetable for this to happen, in late August and early September, the project will finalize the technical components of the grants manual, define the bidding process, and the RFA specifications. By mid-November, 2015, a call for grants applications will be announced. The successful TVET institutions will be announced by the end of January 2016.

### Implementation Challenges

The project encountered some difficulties with LANITH when the project offered them an EIA partnership. LANITH expressed an interest to join but was concerned that it might not be able to fully participate in the EAI activities due to its small size and limited number of faculty and staff. They were concerned that they would not be able to release four instructors to join in the TOT and complete the post-TOT curriculum development and implementation activities. The project held several discussions with LANITH to devise a feasible implementation plan that met both the requirements of the USAID COMET EAI partnership initiative and would not impose too heavily on LANITH's own institutional needs. The project is pleased that a solution was found since LANITH is a strong vocational school with a quality program. It has much to offer as a potential leadership institution.

2.7 PMP Update: Component II, Vocational Training to the current Workforce in Priority Areas Improved.

**Indicator # 2.2 Number of trainers that received training in innovative approaches to teach in-demand skills in STEM+AT as a result of USG assistance**

Q3 Target: 24

Q3 achieved: 0

LOA target: 720

YI target: 120

Cumulative achieved (annual): 0

% Annual Performance achieved to the End of Reporting Period: N/A (No target in Q3)

There are no targets for indicators 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 in YI.

## 5. COMPONENT THREE, DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

Under Component Three, the focus is placed on developing the leadership capacity of higher education institutions in each of the five Lower Mekong countries.

Core technical activities under Component Three in Year I include the following:

- Selection of four universities to participate in the EAI Partnership Initiative;
- Development and delivery of Training of Trainers workshop for the EAls;
- Follow-up monitoring and provision of technical assistance to support university EAls to test the USAID COMET training model at their universities.

### Blended Learning Training Pilot

As the final step in the Blended Learning Training Pilot, implemented last quarter with the Faculty of Engineering at Mahidol University (MU), the USAID COMET project successfully completed a two-day training workshop for twenty-one engineering students from July 11-12, 2015. During the two-day training, the students learned critical work readiness skills through the application of innovative technologies and applied them in workplace simulations.

Trained instructors implemented a session with students to test several training models including Effective Leadership, Teamwork and Effective Presentations. Nine instructors who previously completed a training-of-trainers workshop tested out their new instructional skills under USAID COMET guidance. Representatives from the Mahidol administration and several other Mahidol faculties, as well as an Assistant Professor from the School of Management Technology, Sirindhorn International Institute of Technology (SIIT), observed the two-day workshop to learn more about the innovative approach to instruction supported by USAID COMET. Mahidol University intends to adopt this approach campus-wide in the near future.

The training engaged students in online, face-to-face, and simulated workplace sessions instead of asking them to passively listen to lectures. Students were given guidance and encouraged to think on their own, solve problems, and produce results individually and as a group, imitating the skills students will need in order to succeed in the workplace.

### Using the Pilot to Update the MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook

With the last step of the Blended Learning Training Pilot process completed, the project used the results and feedback from instructors and students to update the MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook to include the Standards Toolkits. The project used formative evaluation very effectively to test and inform revisions to the Sourcebook, the training process and to assist with the preparation of the TOT to be conducted in Phnom Penh in Q4.

### University EAls Join the Orientation to EAI Partnership Initiative

Along with LANITH (see Section 4, above), the university EAls, the University of Yangon in Myanmar, Hanoi University of Science and Technology in Vietnam, Institute of Technology of

Cambodia in Cambodia and Mahidol University in Thailand, joined the workshop held in Vientiane from June 22-23. Two representatives, one administrator and one instructor, from each university participated in the activities in Vientiane.

The results of the workshop in Vientiane provided further inputs and updates to the training model, the Sourcebook and how the TOT in Phnom Penh and implementation of the toolkits should be planned and designed. In addition, all the participants shared their experiences with each other and learned from their neighboring countries. The dialogue among institutions bridged perceived and real gaps between the universities and the small tourism vocational school. LANITH had much to offer, and when LANITH spoke everyone listened. All the participants agreed that one of the most useful aspects of the meeting was the sharing among institutions.

## 2.11 PMP Update: Component Three, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

### **Indicator #3.1 Number of universities with instructors trained in innovative approaches to teaching STEM+AT courses**

Q3 target: 0

Q3 achieved: 0

LOA target: 15

Y1 target: 0

Cumulative achieved (annual): 1

% Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: N/A (No target in Y1)

### **Indicator #3.2 Number of university instructors that receive training in innovative approaches to teaching in-demand skills in targeted STEM+AT fields as a result of USG assistance**

Q3 target: 0

Q3 achieved: 0

LOA target: 120

Y1 target: 16

Cumulative achieved (annual): 11

% Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: 69% achieved

### **Indicator # 3.4 Number of university students in STEM+AT fields with access to curriculum that meets the ASEAN-targeted standards in STEM+AT sectors as a result of regional TOT workshops**

Q3 target: 0

Q3 achieved: 16

LOA target: 3,600

Y1 target: 0

Cumulative achieved (annual): 32

% Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: N/A (No target in Y1)

For Q3, another 16 students participated in the "New Generation MU Engineers" which was during the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> June 2015. The students from both trainings were all from the Faculty of Engineering of Mahidol University, Thailand.

There are no targets for indicators 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 in Y1.

Although there no targets set for Y1 for indicator 3.5 "Percent of impacted [university] students that receive improved methods in the delivery of STEM+AT instruction are from rural communities in the Lower Mekong sub-region", pending targets for Y2, Y3, Y4, and Y5 for this indicator will be set by the M&E team based on the findings from the Impact Assessment of Institutions. The USAID COMET program team aims to have the targets set after the first study is completed and shared with USAID for further discussion.

## 6. INTEGRATION OF CROSSCUTTING ISSUES AND USAID FORWARD PRIORITIES

### Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

USAID COMET project addresses gender equality and female empowerment through project activities, by providing mechanisms to boost female participation in e-Learning and face-to-face training in STEM+AT in the Lower Mekong. The USAID COMET training approach using nine pedagogical standards allows instructors to arrange instructional experiences that support improved instructional opportunities for females. For instance, some active learning techniques support lower risk instructional environment for females by promoting female group learning, anonymous questioning, and other methods. Additionally, female instructors in STEM+AT skill areas can showcase their innovative instructional practices by joining and implementing the MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook.

As discussed in Section 3, the project is in the process of collecting data on the gender distribution across industries and within educational institutions. The Baseline Assessment revealed significant variability in gender representation across industries; In Q4, the project will collect data on gender distribution at educational institutions. This comprehensive snapshot will then allow USAID COMET to develop targeted, evidence-based solutions to closing the gender gap in STEM+AT industries across the LM region.

### Sustainability Mechanisms

USAID COMET places a high priority on making the project interventions sustainable by creating systems designed for replication and adaptation. The project's *toolkit approach* enables each instructor to become responsible for providing the actual content for the curricula s/he develops while allowing each instructor to take ownership over content development since they are best suited to localize curricula. Through the toolkits, USAID COMET is able to ensure that a consistent set of objectives and guidelines, set by the USAID COMET curriculum development team, are reflected in each instructor's own curriculum. By using this standards-based approach, USAID COMET seeks to avoid the "one size fits all" assumption inherent in prescriptive approaches. This model inherently promotes sustainability because its underlying assumption is that with instructor-directed customization and buy-in, training will be relevant to the exact context that each instructor creates within his or her own classroom.

The project sustainability model works on two levels. The first level targets those who will use the MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook and the Standards Toolkits, the university and TVET instructors. These instructors will become the purveyors of the model. At the second level, the project will work at the institutional level to provide support to the institutions as they share the approach with other institutions. This resource empowers instructors to proactively innovate their classrooms, collaborate with other instructors, and engage with industry partners – creating a sustainable system that bridges the skills gaps at the level of local labor markets. In order to provide assistance at the institutional level, the project decided to hire a Senior Institutional Specialist to focus on support for institution-wide adaptation of the USAID

COMET model and support for Mekong Learning Centers to share the model with other partner institutions.

### Environmental Compliance

In accordance with clause H.15 of the USAID COMET contract, EDC does not anticipate any ongoing or planned activities that would impact environmental compliance.

### Local Capacity Development

The activities with EAI instructors prepared them to begin upgrading the courses they offer. The project worked with two instructors from each of the five EAI institutions. In addition, the project trained 20 Faculty of Engineering instructors from Mahidol University in Thailand in five work-readiness modules. These instructors implemented these modules with a group of 20 students.

### Public Private Partnership (PPP) and Global Development Alliance (GDA) Impacts

No results to report at this time.

### Science, Technology, and Innovation Impacts

The web portal is being designed for frequent updating, providing up-to-date content and information of relevant to all target users. The portal is also designed with several levels of accessibility to balance an open and public face to the portal with restricted content designed to encourage sharing across closed communities, such as through the instructor-only Community of Practice. As users return and require increasingly more sophisticated content and information, the portal will selectively grant more in-depth access and sharing with other stakeholders. This approach remains open to all, yet at the same time provides more specific and tailored opportunities for those with linked directly with the project. During this quarter, the project prepared the conceptual design for the portal and began to develop specifications for a vendor's meeting.

The USAID COMET project is also investigating ways to promote the use of *Offline Technologies*, such as robotics, 3-D printing, build sets, and the introduction of maker spaces or other innovative ways to introduce and engage students, teachers, and business partners in engaging with new technologies that both form the foundation for later workplace skills and do not rely on the internet for usability.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) may play a significant leadership role in establishing these programs, including through its planned role at the upcoming annual regional workshops. Discussions with MIT to finalize a scope of work are continuing. The current draft scope of work with MIT includes the following areas of concentration:

- Developing an online mentorship/community of practice: tools for building remote relationships and supporting information exchange for instructors.



- Identifying and promoting best practices in technologies and approaches (including public-private partnerships) to support linkage of labor market information, jobs, competencies and skills with courses, program offerings and degrees in support of USAID COMET's work-based learning toolkit;
- Thinking outside the blended learning box: introducing high tech without the internet (i.e., robotics toolkits, engineering challenges, etc.)

## USAID COMET Project Outreach

The COMET COP participated in the annual South East Asian Ministers of Education Secretariat Office (SEAMEO) Center Directors Meeting in Bangkok on June 10. The COP made a presentation on the project and held a discussion with representatives of eight SEAMEO centers that appeared to have keen interest in the project. USAID COMET will hold follow-up discussions with the SEAMEO Secretariat and the SEAMEO Director to determine the form and scope of collaboration.

The USAID COMET COP made a trip to Hanoi, Vietnam, from April 22-24 to introduce the USAID COMET project to the ASEAN SOM-ED meeting. During the trip, the COP and USAID ACOR also met with representatives from the Hanoi University of Science and Technology to discuss the possibility of the university partnering with USAID COMET as an Education Advisory Institution.

## Partnership Development Efforts

In Q3, the USAID COMET team carried on partnership discussions with potential organizations and also explored other new possibilities. Information on each partnership is detailed below:

### Mahidol University

The project team organized a two-day workshop for Mahidol University's engineering students in cooperation with faculty members from June 11-12. As a preparation for this pilot training workshop, the project's M&E manager gave the students a two-hour training on various Google applications such as Google mail and Google form on June 8.

During the two-day workshop, the fourth-year engineering students studied teamwork and leadership skills in online, face-to-face and simulated workplace settings. After the workshop, the project collected feedback and comments from the instructors, and intended to use this information in the process of further developing curriculum-design toolkits.

### CISCO Systems Thailand

The project participated in the Cisco Networking Academy Partner Summit held from May 21-22, in Bangkok. The COP made a 45-minute presentation on the project and joined a Q&A session with four other presenters. The Summit brought together 100 delegates from 15 countries in the region with a significant number from the ASEAN region. CISCO arranged meetings for the USAID COMET team to network with the CISCO corporate team and universities at the summit event.

### Google

The USAID COR agreed with the proposed plan of procuring 20 Chromebooks for use in Thailand and having the Chromebook procured under grant mechanism for use each country. Following the launch of the MekongSkills2Work website, the team coordinated with Google to set up the Google Classroom account. The possibility of procuring 20 Chromebooks for use at the TOT was explored. The team contacted Google to seek clarification on custom clearance for the shipment of the Chromebooks to and from Thailand for use at the TOT in Cambodia. Later, the team learned from Google's experience that shipment of used electronics devices into Thailand must meet stringent requirements from the Government of Thailand Customs Department. Therefore, it was decided that it would not be feasible to ship Chromebooks for use at the MTOT in Cambodia. The project surveyed the nominated participants to the TOT and found that nearly all of them have laptops. It was decided to ask the participants to bring their laptops to use during the TOT. The project will bring some Android tablets to the TOT so that those participants who do not have laptops will be able to use the loaned devices from the project.

The project team continues to explore the best ways to integrate Google Classroom in future training workshops such as the planned training of master trainers next year.

### Hewlett-Packard

USAID COMET continues the dialogue with HP on potential areas of partnership. The team gave an update on the activity plan for EAI and COE partnerships and discussed HP's interest in providing direct or in-kind support to the Centers. The project also invited HP to join a marketplace session during the upcoming Training of Trainers Workshop in Cambodia.

### Intel

USAID and the project met with Intel in April. Intel offered to provide training to USAID COMET participants using Intel's Galileo smart boards and Easy Steps curricula. The training is planned to take place around September in Thailand for a total of 20 instructors from 5 USAID COMET's institutional partners. In addition to the training support, Intel also agreed to provide 20 sets of Galileo smart kits to each of the five institutions for use in their instructional programs.

### Microsoft

USAID and the project had several calls with Microsoft Singapore to discuss potential partnership activities. The Microsoft team introduced the project to their Digital Literacy TOT training program. This program trains instructors how to use technology in training. Microsoft also introduced the project to the Microsoft IT Academy. The IT Academy Program is an online subscription program providing digital curriculum and certifications for fundamental technology skills. The project invited Microsoft to observe the upcoming TOT workshop for EAI partners in Cambodia and to join a marketplace session. The marketplace will provide the project's technology partners an opportunity to introduce their products to the EAI partners. Microsoft is finalizing plans to participate in the marketplace session.

### National Instruments

National Instruments signed an MOU with USAID on May 8, 2015. NI will support higher education and vocational education, and work with the USAID COMET project.<sup>2</sup>

The project held discussions with National Instruments (NI) in June to learn about the use of NI's MyRio technology in the manufacturing industry and NI's plan to participate in the USAID COMET TOT workshop in August. Both sides also discussed other possible partnership activities.

PRIME Agri Ltd. and PRIME Energy Partners Ltd. The USAID COR and the project's Country Activities Coordinator met with the CEO of PRIME Agri Ltd., and the CEO of PRIME Energy Partners Ltd., in early June to discuss potential opportunities to support human capital development within the Myanmar agricultural sector. PRIME Agri Ltd. is supporting the strengthening of vocational training programs at several State Agricultural Institutes (SAI) in Myanmar, introducing good agricultural practices, improved curricula, and practical learning opportunities for students on PRIME Demonstration Training and Research Farms. The project and PRIME Agri Ltd. will continue conversations on how to engage SAs into the project and explore inviting instructors from SAI Heho to attend the upcoming Training of Trainers Workshop in August 2015.

## 7. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

### Staffing

In the third quarter, the project was focused on recruiting and hiring personnel to fill the following vacancies.

- Finance and Administrative Assistant
- Senior Communication Specialist
- Training Manager

In June 2015, the project terminated the contracts of the Finance and Administrative Assistant and the Senior Communication Specialist (separation effective July 2015).

Based on the evolving needs of the project, it was necessary for the project to reconfigure current staffing to ensure high quality program and technical support in order to maximize the project's significant results and impact. This process will be finalized in the next quarter.

### STTA

During this quarter, the project received technical assistance and support from the following EDC Home Office technical staff.

- **International Project Coordinator (IPC)** worked with the communications and portal development team to finalize an online development strategy, outline the back-end architecture, and develop clear SOWs for vendors for phases of the website-to-portal development transition. The IPC trip to the Bangkok office during June 16 to 25th

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/asia-regional/press-releases/may-8-2015-usaid-and-ni-collaborate-enable-youth-lower-mekong-0>

- **Instructional Designer and Facilitator** for the Orientation to EAI Partnerships Workshop took the lead in the finalization of the revised blended-learning strategy documents and toolkit, which were shared with EAls during the workshop and facilitation of the workshop during June 22-23, 2015 in Vientiane, Laos.

The project welcomed Marina Yalon, an intern from Georgetown University, Washington, DC. Ms. Yalon's internship at USAID COMET in Bangkok is the first activity with the 226-year-old university. From June 2015, Ms. Yalon has worked closely with the project's Monitoring & Evaluation Manager focusing on key M&E activities including development of tools for use in the Institutional Capacity Assessment Study and the design and planning process of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Labor Market Assessment.

### Property Records of IT Resources

The project received USAID's approval of the format for the required Record of IT Resources on June 29, 2015. The project will submit the completed records of IT resources acquired under the contract from the start of the contract through April 6, 2015 to USAID early next quarter.

## 8. LESSONS LEARNED

### Use of Google Applications

The team spent time orienting the instructors to how the Google Drive would be used to access resources and for learners to share materials. There was a range of experience in the room of instructors from those who don't use the Google Apps to those already using Google Classroom. It was clear that the work around could easily be perceived as confusing, even though the team made it as simple as possible. This underscored the need to get Google Classroom in place as soon as possible.

## 9. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER INCLUDING UPCOMING EVENTS

Planned Activities for Next Quarter	
Activities	Outputs and Deadlines
<b>COMPONENT 1: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND SKILLED WORKFORCE</b>	
<b>I.1 Development of web portal development plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Complete the final draft for review and circulate to interested local vendors by September 1, 2015</li> </ul>
<b>I.2 Selection of local vendors for web portal development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Finalize the selection in October 2015 with vendor presentations expected the second week of October.</li> <li>· Begin the development process in November 2015</li> </ul>
<b>I.3 Subcontract for ISPR for the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual update of the labor market assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Finalize scope of the study, timeline and budget by early September 2015</li> <li>· Execute the subcontract with IPSR by mid–</li> </ul>

	<p>September 2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Begin field data collection by mid-September 2015</li> </ul>
<b>1.4 Development of instructional tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Refine and finalize toolkits after receiving feedback from instructors representing the five EAls at the Vientiane orientation workshop July 2015</li> </ul>
<b>COMPONENT 2: TRAINING TODAY'S WORKFORCE (VOCATIONAL)</b>	
<b>2.1 Formalize relationship with LANITH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Finalize scope of work and budget for the implementation of MekongSkills2Work Implementation Toolkit and test of the new developed curriculum by mid-August 2015</li> <li>· Execute the subcontract to support the implementation activities by mid-August 2015</li> </ul>
<b>2.2 Support and collect feedback for the Year I model testing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Monitor and provide technical support to LANITH from mid-August-December 2015</li> <li>· Collect feedback from LANITH to inform the design of future TOTs, grants program and training approach from mid-August to December 2015</li> </ul>
<b>COMPONENT 3: DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS (HIGHER EDUCATION)</b>	
<b>3.1 Formalize relationship with university EAls</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Finalize scope of work and budget for the implementation of MekongSkills2Work Implementation Toolkit and test of the new developed curriculum by mid-August 2015</li> <li>· Execute the subcontract to support the implementation activities by mid-August 2015</li> </ul>
<b>3.2 Support and collect feedback for the Year I model testing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Monitor and provide technical support to university EAls from mid-August-December 2015</li> <li>· Collect feedback from university EAls to inform the design of future TOTs, grants program and training approach from mid-August to December 2015</li> </ul>
<b>3.3 Development of Institutional profiles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Collect list and contact information of tertiary educational institutions (university and TVET institution) in July 2015</li> <li>· Collect information data to develop institutional profiles in August-mid September 2015</li> <li>· Complete the institution profiles in September 2015</li> </ul>
<b>3.4 Grants program for 15 Mekong Learning Centers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Begin preparation work for grants program (including development of RFA for on-line dissemination, selection criteria and solicitation process) in September 2015</li> </ul>
<b>Upcoming Events for Next Quarters</b>	
<b>Month</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>a. 3-7 AUGUST</b>	USAID COMET plans to conduct a Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop for instructors representing the five EAls from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. This workshop will train the instructors how to plan, develop and implement supplemental

	curricula using the USAID COMET's toolkits. The training will take place in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
<b>b.           SEPTEMBER (Dates to be confirmed)</b>	Intel and USAID COMET will jointly conduct the Intel Galileo Development Board Program for 20 higher education level instructors from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Additionally, Intel will donate a total of 200 Galileo boards to the higher education institutions that participate in the training. The training will take place in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand.

## 10.COMMUNICATION

### Communication Staffing

- Ms. Warangkana Tempati joined the USAID COMET team as the Senior Communications Specialist on May 11th, and resigned as of June 31st, 2015.

### Revised outreach materials for different target audiences

- The project has changed the name of “Centers of Excellence” to “Mekong Learning Centers” when referring to a tertiary education institution partners that take the lead in building the capacity of other education institutions.
- USAID COMET developed targeted 4 briefers as external communication materials: “Project Overview,” “Mekong Learning Centers,” “Industry Partners,” and “Training Approach”
- USAID COMET has been given permission to include USAID, ASEAN, and LMI logos in all external communication materials.

### Social Media

MS2W continues to promote online presence and disseminate relevant information to target audiences through two main channels: MekongS2Work Twitter and LMI Facebook Page. The following are the statistics from April – July 2015:

- MekongS2Work Twitter:
  - Top Tweets:
    - ❖ Check out these 10 best practices in **#BlendedLearning!** [ow.ly/MCUKS](http://ow.ly/MCUKS) **#technology** **#education** **#edtech** [pic.twitter.com/dlfycIWuMF](http://pic.twitter.com/dlfycIWuMF)
    - ❖ How can you help friends who have been trafficked in **#ASEAN**? Check out [@IOMXorg](http://6degree.org) <https://twitter.com/USAIDAsia/status/620488930509606912> ...
    - ❖ Why's it hard to find jobs in **#Mekong** when 80% of industries want to hire new staff? **@USAIDAsia** report explains [ow.ly/OP7QG](http://ow.ly/OP7QG)
  - Tweet engagements (re-tweets, replies, favorites): 175
  - Tweet impressions: 13,113
- LMI Facebook:
  - Total page likes: 186,379
  - Page like increase from April – July: 34,484
  - Facebook engagement (Post likes, shares, comments): 8,963
  - Top posts:





**Lower Mekong Initiative** shared U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh, Cambodia's post.

Published by MekongSkills ToWork (?) · April 17 ·



**U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh, Cambodia** added 4 new photos.

Celebrating Khmer New Year  
-From the Ambassador's Penh

I want to take this opportunity not only to wish a Happy Khmer New Year to all Cambodians, but share how we celebrated this important holiday at the U.S. Embassy last week. As you can see in these photos, we had a wonderful time marking the arrival of the Year of the Goat! Thanks to our Cambodian staff members who organized the annual New Year celebration for the community, we enjoyed traditional Khmer culture, games, food, and dance. In particular, I want to recognize the commitment of our Local Employee Committee members who work diligently to help us maintain high employee morale year round.

The beauty of Cambodian culture was on full display with performances by the children from the National Action Culture for the Orphan Poor Children Association (NACOPCA), an NGO dedicated to providing poor and orphaned children with accommodation, food, and education while giving them an opportunity to learn traditional Cambodian dancing. Following the traditional Blessing Dance was the



**Lower Mekong Initiative**

Published by MekongSkills ToWork (?) · June 26 ·

June 25-26: Regional English Language Office in Bangkok concluded another successful year of the Lower Mekong Initiative Professional Communication Skills for Leaders (PCSL) English project with a Symposium on English for Specific Purposes. Nearly 80 English language teachers and administrators representing all 10 ASEAN countries participated.

Photo: Gathering of Public Affairs Officers, Regional English Language Office Officers, English Language Fellows, English Language Specialists, Thai Ministry of Education officials, and Chulalongkorn University representatives.



1,119 people reached

Boost Post

Like Comment Share

Lower Mekong Initiative, Ya Min, Rom Ros and 26 others like this.





### Lower Mekong Initiative

Published by MekongSkills ToWork (?) · June 29 at 6:46pm · 🌐

How can #Thailand improve its competitiveness, especially as #AEC is approaching?

In Thailand's latest economic monitor, improving the skills and productivity of the country's workforce are central to improving its competitiveness. However, many students, especially in rural villages, do not have the skills for jobs in a growing modern Thai economy. See what challenges they face and what can be done to ensure that all students receive a good #education.

Find out more in World Bank's report below:

<http://www.worldbank.org/.../thailand-improving-the-quality-o...>



Thai students' performance on international assessments improved over the past decade. Still, on closer look, many students, especially in rural villages, do not have the skills for many jobs in the growing modern Thai economy.

600 people reached

Boost Post



### Lower Mekong Initiative via USAID Asia

Published by MekongSkills ToWork (?) · July 15 at 2:10pm · 🌐

How are you making yourself more work-ready? What kinds of skills do you need? #WYSD

See what employers in the Lower Mekong say they're looking for in new hires in the link below.



### Survey Says Businesses Seek University and Vocational College Graduates with More Relevant Work...

Businesses in the Lower Mekong say post-secondary schools are not adequately preparing graduates for the local job market, according to a new survey...

USAID.GOV

798 people reached

Boost Post

## Success Story & Press Release

The following article based on the findings of the regional labor market assessment has been posted on the USAID Asia website and disseminated through relevant social media channels:

### **SURVEY SAYS: Businesses Seek University and Vocational College Graduates with More Relevant Work Skills in Lower Mekong<sup>3</sup>**

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#### **Success story idea:**

The “New Generation MU Engineer” workshop in Thailand and the "Orientation to Education Advisory Institution (EAI) Partnerships meeting" in Laos are steps of a journey to revolutionize tertiary education in the region to better prepare graduates for work.

The story is to include quotes from instructors, students, and representatives from USAID and/or ASEAN who participated in the workshops on the effectiveness of the USAID COMET approach, and its potential to serve the labor market needs of the region sustainably.

#### **Draft of success story:**

### **USAID Using Technology, Collaboration, and Innovative Learning to Improve Workforce in the Lower Mekong**

Are you a visionary or collaborative leader? Professor Phattanard Phattanasri, from Mahidol University, Thailand, learned about the different styles of leadership and methods of applying them in class to enhance employability of his students.

Engineering students from Mahidol University, Thailand, got the opportunity to experience innovative and active learning approaches in the "New Generation MU Engineers" workshop from June 11-12, 2015, with the focus on work readiness skills being highlighted.

*[Quote from USAID representatives on importance of employability skills and the initiative to improve the workforce in the Lower Mekong]*

This is the second workshop to test out this innovative model that highlights the use to technology, collaboration, and 21st century skills. Feedback from the workshops were utilized to adapt and improve training approaches in the Partnerships meeting in Laos during June 22-23, 2015.

*"I've learned greatly about connecting with others and using technology. Getting a platform to collaborate and connect with others in the region about improving students' skills in a fun and engaging way was very valuable" [Quote from Professor Phattanard].*

The workshops are part of the United States Agency for International Development Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (USAID COMET) initiative which aims to bridge the skills gaps within key growth sectors in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Instructors and students got the chance to test out the project's innovative approach

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/asia-regional/press-releases/may-26-2015-survey-says-businesses-seek-university-and-vocational>

to classroom environments - integrating technology in the lessons, involving real employers' needs, and fostering 21st century skills.

In a recent USAID study of employers in the Mekong region, nearly 80 percent indicated that they are currently looking to hire new staff. However, in these countries, skilled workers are in high-demand, but in short supply.

In USAID COMET's approach, students' responsibilities shift from being fed knowledge in class to being in charge of their own learnings; instructors can foster more relevant skills needed through active learning approaches; and industries switch their roles from being passive consumers of talent to being actively involved in the development of the future of the workforce needed in their sector.

*[Quote from Professor Phattanard or ASEAN Official on how he is looking forward to seeing USAID COMET approaches expand in the Lower Mekong sub region]*

In order to minimize the skills gaps and take advantage of the upcoming ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), USAID COMET focuses on providing training and resources key growth sectors in STEM+AT (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, and tourism) to meet these needs, to meet private sector demand, and to create more competitive economies.





## Participation in the USAID communication workshop

The USAID COMET team had a communication meeting with representatives of other USAID-funded projects at the USAID office in Bangkok on April 30.

## II. HOW IMPLEMENTING PARTNER HAS ADDRESSED COR COMMENTS FROM THE LAST QUARTERLY OR ANNUAL REPORT

No comments for corrective action were included from the last report